



August 4, 2021

Beloved Members and Friends of the Church,

Yesterday, I became aware that Lincoln County had been classified as having “substantial” transmission of COVID-19. This first for our county since the new guidance from the CDC was shared has raised many questions and concerns about what next steps we as a church need to take. If you are like me, this news probably sat heavy in your hearts as we have journeyed so far and have taken many steps back toward normal. What now will we do when Lincoln County is in the “substantial” or “high” transmission category? How will we respond in faith?

I ask this last question very intentionally because there are many ways we could choose to respond as individuals. We could respond from a political viewpoint or from a personal feeling of what we want. For instance, I am personally exhausted by the idea of having to wear a mask once more. We could respond in anger or worry. Yet, as a church that seeks to follow Jesus, I believe we need to respond from our faith in Christ first and foremost. We need to respond from the lessons of the gospel and the life of Jesus. After all, this is what unites us in such a deeply divided world. We need to respond in faith.

In so many ways, Jesus calls us to look toward one another and care for one another. Whether that is in meeting the physical, emotional, or spiritual needs, the focus is, more often than not, on the other. In our congregation, we have beloved children of God who are vaccinated and those who are not, whether by choice, by health constraints, or by age eligibility requirements. We have beloved children of God who need to be physically present in our space for their spiritual and emotional well-being and also need to be protected. We have beloved children of God who would be considered high risk. We have beloved children of God who live with and care for those with weakened immune systems. And we have you, for you are a beloved child of God too!

How will we care for all of these beloved children of God when Lincoln County is classified as having “substantial” or “high” transmission? I simply ask that we follow the CDC’s guidelines and all mask up. It is a small thing to do to care for others. When transmission is “substantial” or “high”, I will mask for you and for every person I encounter in my life and in the ministry that I am called to do here in this place. I will mask in worship so that I am less likely to carry this disease to my spouse or my one-year-old niece. I will mask when I am indoors around others so that I am less likely to

share it if I am carrying it unbeknownst to me. There are many things that I long to share with you and our wider community, but COVID is not one of them.

I ask you to join me. **If Lincoln County is classified as “substantial” or “high” on a given Sunday, please mask with me when indoors, regardless of vaccination status. If we are classified as “substantial” or “high” when you are at the church for a visit or meeting, please mask with me.**

This is not a requirement, as I believe such a decision need to come from the Council. I will be asking the Council to consider such a decision at their next meeting on August 18th. This is rather a request from my heart that we adhere to the CDC recommendation that everyone wears a mask indoors when rates of transmission are “substantial” or “high” in Lincoln County. When rates are “low” or “moderate”, we may revert back to our latest protocols. I will do my best to communicate with the congregation where we are every Sunday or for any gathering and I invite you to stay informed as well.

None of us want to hear that masking may be back, even if intermittently. Preaching through fogged up glasses or masking on a hot and humid day is certainly not something I want to do. Yet, I will for the care of others. That is what I believe my faith in Jesus is calling me to do. Please join me.

In Christian Love,

Josh Fitterling, Minister